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Cultural Colonization and Young Adult Liturgical Experience

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Abstract: As Catholic churches around the United States close and those that remain open take note of their aging parishioners, young adults are seen as the answer. But how do we engage young adults in the ancient worship of the Catholic Church, when the United States culture directs them to what is shiny and new? When many consider how to engage young adults, they typically start with the Eucharistic Liturgy. This article looks at what the U. S. Catholic bishops have described as the cultural colonization of the Eucharistic Liturgy and the role the U. S. culture plays in our society and in our approaches to God and faith.

Keywords: Young Adults, Liturgy, Culture, Generations, Millennials, Technology and Faith Formation, Young Adult Ministry.

Introduction

When we think of liturgy, culture is not usually the first thing to come to mind. All too often we think of music and preaching, forgetting that our liturgical celebrations, rooted in the word of God, are steeped in culture. This rootedness in culture also asks that we break free from some aspects of culture so that we are able to express God's changing action in our lives. We must keep in mind, however, that our expression of God's changing action is done from our own cultural perspective.

In the Catholic Church today, questions are being asked about how to engage young adults in the faith: liturgy, sacramental celebrations, ministry, Church leadership, vocations, devotions, etc. Though the field is large and should be a priority for the growth of our Church, I will only be addressing the effect the United States (US) culture has on the liturgical experience of young adults. This discussion will focus on young adults born between 1982-1996 (Millennials). I will first take a look at several earlier generations and briefly explore what was happening during their coming of age (in society and in the Church). I will then look closely at Millennials and the events that have shaped them, focusing on US cultural influences. I will also speak about the effects the US culture is having on the Church. I will include some details from

my own work with this age group. Next, I will cover what many young adults have to say about liturgy and the Catholic faith in general. Lastly, I will include some pastoral recommendations that have come out of the Final Document of the Fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

Catholicism is steeped in culture. From its beginnings in Judaism to its current expression in many languages and peoples, we have been unable to separate Catholicism from culture. So, what is culture and why is it important to this discussion? Culture has a fluid definition depending on many variables. For the purposes of this paper, my definition of culture is the lens through which a person views everything; it is a way of being in the world; it is one's worldview shaped by origin, socioeconomics, race, religion (or lack of) and age. Culture is important because the person is important. What shapes a person also shapes his or her response to and interaction with God. Linked to culture is context, the situation in which one lives. According to theologian, Steven Bevans, "as our cultural and historical context plays a part in the construction of the reality in which we live, so our context influences the understanding of God and the expression of faith."¹ With this in mind, I want to address the fact that there exists in the US a common culture that affects people, no matter their ethnicity, social status, education, sexual orientation, etc.

Generations Defined

When I began researching this topic, I was struck by the porous nature of the definition of generation. My understanding was that a generation is the time span between parent and child, e.g. my mother, me, and my son comprise three generations. However, when I began to look at generational distinctions, I found my definition to be inadequate. The word generation has a fluid definition because the timeframe in which people have children is elastic, e.g. families where the offspring span more than one decade are considered the next generation of their parents, but the children themselves may belong to different generations. Therefore, in trying to explain the uniqueness of Millennials, I had to find a more current definition of generation. According to dictionary.com, generation is "1. the entire body of individuals born and living at about the same time: the postwar

¹ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures*, rev.ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 4.

generation. 2. the term of years, roughly 30 among human beings, accepted as the average period between the birth of parents and the birth of their offspring. 3. a group of individuals, most of whom are the same approximate age, having similar ideas, problems, attitudes, etc."¹ Wikipedia's subcategory "Social generation" adds, "generations are cohorts of people born in the same date range and who share similar cultural experiences."² Michael Dimock, president of Pew Research Center, states that "generations provide the opportunity to look at Americans both by their place in the life cycle—whether a young adult, a middle-aged parent or a retiree—and by their membership in a cohort of individuals who were born at a similar time."³

Naming the Generations and Their Experience

With generational designations occurring about every 20 years, I found that there are three generations that must be looked at in order to fully understand Millennials. These generations are the Pioneers/Silent/Pre-Vatican II, Baby Boomers/Vatican II, and Generation X (Postmoderns)/Post-Vatican II.⁴

The Pioneers/Silent (born 1928-1945)/Pre-Vatican II (ages 74-91) came of age after the Great Depression and World Wars I and II. Cultural changes include the beginnings of rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues, the transistor radio, the civil rights movement and a general belief that the government would protect them. During this time, Catholics were considered to be mostly immigrants from European countries.⁵ As immigrants they were largely marginalized and looked

¹ Dictionary.com, "Generation", <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/generation?s=t> (accessed 15 May 2019).

² Wikipedia, "Generation", <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation> (accessed 15 May 2019).

³ Michael Dimock, "Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins," <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/> (accessed 22 May 2019).

⁴ The generational designations in this section are taken from the following sources: Craig Kennet Miller and MaryJane Pierce Norton, *Making God Real for a New Generation: Ministry with Millennials Born from 1982 to 1999*, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, "Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice among US Catholics," and Pew Research Center, "Millennial life: How young adulthood today compares with prior generations."

⁵ William, D'Antonio, "Survey reveals generation shift in the Catholic church," <https://www.ncronline.org/news/survey/survey-reveals-generation-shift-catholic-church> (accessed 6 August 2019).

upon as lowly individuals.⁶ This view by secular society caused Catholics to become close-knit groups divided by ethnicity for support and encouragement, and to become dependent on the Church that served as a safe place away from the misery of US society. Pre-Vatican II Catholics believed in the authority of the Church hierarchy, particularly the authority of the parish priest. This belief extended to all the Church's teachings, further enabling people's dependence on the Church and her leaders.⁷

The Baby Boomers (born 1946-1963)/Vatican II (ages 54-72) came of age during the Cold and Vietnam Wars, Watergate, civil rights laws, color television, sex for fun and a growing distrust of the government and authority. The US at this time was undergoing economic growth and expansion of industry into other countries. Catholics of this generation integrated into US society and politics, "gaining acceptance and moving up the nation's social ladder."⁸ As children, they experienced a Church in transition, quite different from their parents' stable Church, which led them to challenge many of the Church's teachings, especially those dealing with morality, such as, sex outside of marriage, contraception and abortion. As a result, the Church for them is not seen as the place to go for refuge.

Generation X/Postmoderns (born 1964-1981)/Post-Vatican II (ages 38-53) came of age after abortion had been legalized, forcing the Catholic Church into the limelight on the issue as Catholic women began to use of this option. They witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall, the discovery, diagnosis, and treatment of AIDS, rising divorce rates, rap and grunge music, televised war, microwave ovens and the beginnings of personal computers, the internet and video games. As latchkey children, they became adults who don't often look beyond themselves for support. By the time Generation Xers were born and were coming age, the majority of US Catholics were part of the middle class and "laypeople were becoming more autonomous in their thinking about issues of faith and morals."⁹ In the spirit of ecumenism, this generation was taught that they needed to be responsible for their own faith

⁶ William, D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Mary L. Gautier, *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 17-18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

journey while seeking out commonalities among other Christian denominations.

This brief look inside the above-mentioned generations illustrates the early movement occurring within the Church where one's response to the Church and her teachings is a direct result of what is happening in US culture. My look inside the lives of Millennials will further detail how far away a generation can travel from the Church and how hard they work to stay connected to it.

Millennials and the US Culture

Millennials (born 1981-1996) have come of age (ages 22-37) in the midst of uncertain times. The economy is unstable: major companies are going bankrupt; executives steal money from their employees using clever business strategies; long-time employees are laid off because of downsizing; home foreclosures are rising and jobs that fit their education and skillsets are hard to find. Manufacturing of US goods is mostly done by other countries making it difficult to find non-skilled employment. Millennials are the first generation to witness a live attack on the country during peacetime, September 11, 2001. Now young adults, they are witnesses, victims and survivors of new forms of US violence: school shootings; workplace and shopping mall killings; increased child abuse and sexual assault; rising gang violence; and assaults on individuals because of their sexual orientation. Alongside this uncertainty is the change in food production and consumption patterns (think fast, genetically modified and artificial food), rising medical costs and declining healthcare coverage, especially for the poor and the elderly.

Technological advancements and availability have grown so rapidly that Millennials don't see themselves separate from it. The internet explosion has opened the door to email; file sharing; instant messaging; and instant access to information, locally and globally. Personal computers and laptops with Wi-Fi make the internet readily available almost anywhere. Cell phones with video, camera, music, email and texting abilities allow young adults to keep their fingers on the pulse of "now." This type of availability to information lends itself to the belief that all aspects of life can function this way. "We need always to assume that a large percentage of young adults believe that instant gratification is merely a click of a mouse or a touch of a button away

and that they can apply this to every area of their life, religion included."¹⁰ Being connected/plugged in/turned on most of the time, allows young adults to be bombarded with images and sounds that force them to "become passive filters of the flood of data streaming toward [them]."¹¹ As passive filters, they are accustomed to being catered to and having businesses compete for their attention.

One thing is for certain, "[t]o be a young American today is to experience both excitement and uncertainty, wide-open possibility and confusion, new freedoms and new fears."¹² There is excitement in expanded media outlets that have made it possible for young adults to create virtual communities through sites like Snapchat, Facebook, Whatsapp, Messenger, Twitter and YouTube. There is also uncertainty in how these communities allow them to become personal in an impersonal way. Possibilities abound in these virtual communities, exposing young adults to new ideas and beliefs, including but not limited to faith, sexuality and relationships. Confusion abounds amidst an overwhelming buffet of choices that make it difficult to choose or stay with one thing. This exposure to unlimited choices creates fear because it becomes difficult to navigate through to what is true, authentic and real.

Millennials and the Church

Like Generation X, Millennials are Post-Vatican II Catholics, but Millennials have a more global view of religion because of the friendships they have made both online and in person. Because this generation interacts with a more diverse population than any generation previous, they have been taught to be more tolerant of others. This tolerance extends itself to explore other people's beliefs as dialogue increases and "notes" are compared. The constant access to "fingertip" information keeps the questions rolling in. As one question is answered another question emerges.

Millennials not only question why they are Catholic and what makes them Catholic, but they also question Church leadership. They question the Church's teachings on sex, gender and marriage, especially

¹⁰ Mike Hayes, *Googling God: The Religious Landscape of People in their 20s and 30s* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007), xii.

¹¹ Christian Piatt and Amy Piatt, *MySpace to Sacred Space: God for a New Generation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 15.

¹² Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.

since the teachings come from Church authority (clergy), the very ones who are involved in the Church's sex abuse scandal. "As the new generation of Millennial Catholics came of age, the scandal seemed to raise new questions about the importance of being Catholic, the substance of being Catholic, and the boundaries between Catholicism and other faiths."¹³ This scandal further encouraged the teachings "[t]hat one's personal relationship with God is more important than the importance of the institutional Catholic Church and that living a Christian way of life is more important than knowing what the Catholic Church teaches."¹⁴

As Catholic education became more expensive and more Catholic children attended public schools, weekend religious education classes stressed an abbreviated curriculum.¹⁵ This curriculum was more about being a good Christian and less about the value of the Catholic Church as central to the faith. It is also important to note that many Millennials were raised in Catholic homes that did not stress Church attendance or where other activities, such as sports, were placed ahead of Church attendance.

The lack of adequate catechesis, the importance of individualism, and the stress put on a personal relationship with God has led many Millennial Catholics to disconnect their Catholic identity from the institutional Catholic Church and the Eucharistic Liturgy. The Liturgy¹⁶ no longer holds sway among this group since they are able to "access" God anywhere, anytime. They hold fast to the teachings that true faith is in how you treat others, and for them, how they treat others cannot be done within the Liturgy. Being a good Catholic for Millennials, therefore, is more about believing that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary suffered, died and was buried, rose on the third day and how those beliefs help someone else. Not ashamed to call themselves Catholic, Millennial Catholics will at the same time speak negatively about the Liturgy or state that the Liturgy just doesn't matter.

In a world where materialism reigns supreme, where success is measured by material gain and worth, and the gospel of prosperity is

¹³ William D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge and Mary L. Gautier, 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁶ The capitalization of Liturgy refers to the Eucharistic Liturgy (my own emphasis).

preached all around, participating in weekly Liturgy just doesn't figure in because Millennial Catholics have not made the connection that the Liturgy is the source of their sustainability—to live as a Christian in all that they do.

The conflict between individualism and community, self-interest and the common good is not seen as a conflict that is to be waged in community, but one that must be done alone. As adults, Millennials think they should have the answer and if they don't, it's just a "Google" away.

Millennial Responses to the Current Liturgical Context

The instant gratification and immediate nature of the US culture has allowed a false self to materialize and perpetuate resulting in what the bishops call, "cultural colonization which uproots young people from their cultural and religious origins."¹⁷ This can be seen in young people from non-Western cultures no longer finding value in their own culture, but attempting to adopt the US culture as their own. This fact makes it difficult for Millennials to find what they desire most in the Liturgy: "intimacy—to be loved and have others to love, community (church-related or not) that shares their values and interests, meaning in their lives and a deeper connection with the Source of Life."¹⁸ Since most things in life cater to them, Millennials are finding it hard to accept that the Liturgy does not.

What do Millennials say is wrong with the Liturgy? Liturgy, they say, is boring and/or irrelevant, the homily doesn't address their concerns, there are no activities or programs organized for them, they are not invited to participate, and the music is not lively. They also say that the Church community is not welcoming, doesn't allow them into the "circle", thinks they're too young to fully understand, is unwilling to listen to their opinions, and thinks that they are uninterested or lack a desire to be included. John Cusick and Katherine DeVries have recorded similar responses from Millennials:

¹⁷ Final Document of the Fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, no. 14. Hereafter cited as FD. <http://www.synod2018.va/content/synod2018/en/fede-discernimento-vocazione/final-document-of-the-synod-of-bishops-on-young-people--faith-an.html> (accessed 22 May 2019).

¹⁸John C. Cusick and Katherine F. DeVries, *The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 2001), 17-18.

My parish seems to serve two groups of people: families with school-aged children and senior citizens. I walk in on Sunday knowing nobody, and I leave knowing nobody. When are they going to learn that they can't have it both ways? They sit and complain that there are no younger people around. When we tried to get involved, they made it clear it had to be their way. A lot of it is my problem. I stopped going to church a while ago. It's hard to come back. I don't want to feel awkward. Someone should tell them to change their language. Almost every time I go to Mass someone says, "Welcome to our parish family." How can they be my family when I don't fit in? I was a communion minister when I was away at college. I called someone about doing that in this parish. So far, no one has gotten back to me. Why don't I get involved? That's easy. There's nothing there for me.¹⁹

Cusick and DeVries have helped the Church return to the importance of including young adults on every level of church organization. Their work helps us get beyond the Liturgy into young adult lives. Yet, "the parish is struggling to be relevant to young people and its missionary vocation needs to be rethought."²⁰ Although Millennials' complaints about the Liturgy are valid, they are in no way exclusive to their generation. Many of us want "good liturgy."

Beyond the Liturgy, Millennials want to learn more about Catholicism. Many remain Catholic because it is the faith of their childhood and they're comfortable with it, but they are dissatisfied with their lack of knowledge. They want to be able to stand in the face of opposition and explain such atrocities as the clergy sex abuse scandal. They want to learn how Catholicism can reflect what they believe about life, behavior, experiences, etc.

Millennials are on the road of self-discovery, attempting to flesh out their identities along the way. They are asking questions like, "Who am I? What am I to do? What is my purpose? How do I make sense of what is happening around me? How do I make sense of my life? Who is God for me? How do I live out my relationship with God in a way that gives meaning to my life?" and they are finding that the Church and/or

¹⁹ Ibid., 23-24.

²⁰ FD, no.18.

the Liturgy doesn't have the quick answers of the internet. "In general, the young say they are searching for the meaning of life and they show interest in spirituality."²¹ Though they may not realize the definition of liturgy as the work of the people, they are finding out that Liturgy is "the people."

Pastoral Recommendations

What Millennials ask of the Liturgy is not foreign to the Church. Every culture that has embraced Catholicism has asked the same thing, to have the Liturgy reflect its beliefs and practices. What is unique to Millennials is that the culture spoken of is one of secularism and consumerism not traditions and history. "The religious experience of the young is strongly influenced by the social and cultural context in which they live."²² To address this issue, let's look at Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC) through the lenses of advertising and marketing, keeping in mind that Millennials are consumers in a 24/7 business-centered world.

There are a couple key points in SC that I feel must be addressed to fully embrace the concerns of Millennials. The first point is the need for the clergy themselves to fully understand the Liturgy. So often we find that priests know the rubrics of celebrating Mass, but don't understand the nature of the Liturgy beyond consecrating the Eucharist. By focusing primarily on the rubrics, clergy miss an opportunity to truly celebrate the lives of their parishioners. "A prime need, therefore, is that attention be directed, first of all, to the liturgical formation of the clergy."²³ If the clergy is not properly formed, neither are the people. The sad thing about this is that the document that quotes this is over fifty years old and we still have clergy that are "Liturgy-impaired." The clergy must seriously look at their role in bringing "the faithful to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy." If they must take a class or attend a workshop that keeps them in touch with the community, then they must do so. The constant influx of information and its changing nature makes it an imperative that clergy take an active rather than reactive role.

The pastor and staff should ensure a welcoming environment that is alive with authenticity, e.g. greetings should not be superficial as though one could care less whether the person was present or not.

²¹ FD, no. 49.

²² FD, no. 48.

²³ Second Vatican Council, Sacrosanctum Concilium (4 December 1963), no. 14. .

Millennials want to know that pastors and staff are “frfr” (for real, for real). Participation in liturgy hinges on whether the celebrant and other ministers are engaging or not. Examples of engagement are lectors who proclaim the scripture with joy instead of trying to rush to complete the task, a celebrant whose homily reflects his relationship with his parishioners, and ushers and greeters who are welcoming. People take their lead from the leader.

The second point is to take seriously the points made in SC no. 19 concerning the promotion of “liturgical instruction of the faithful...taking into account their age and condition, their way of life, and their stage of religious development.” Even though I’m speaking of Millennials, it is my position that we will continue to be faced with generational issues if we do not keep this front and center. We must focus on all the generations simultaneously by inviting each one to be members of the various ministries—together. Sure, it seems strange to have elderly members in the youth group, but they can serve as sources of wisdom for teens while the teens teach new technology or assist in senior care. The Church must reflect all the parts of the community, not just the easy parts.

Authentic Communication

Personal invitation extends the hand of Jesus. It is a sign of welcome that must permeate everything from the songs sung, the prayers prayed, the art displayed and the literature written.²⁴ Listening is also a part of the invitation. To invite is to open dialogue not to give directives. Therefore, we must listen to what a young adult has to say about our invitation. “The young are called to make constant choices that give direction to their lives; they express the desire to be heard, recognized, accompanied.”²⁵ I cannot stress enough the importance of authenticity. Authenticity is not synonymous with perfection. Millennials are not looking for perfect people. They are looking for people who live in the joys and sorrows, the ups and downs, and the grace and mercy of God. This living through our flaws is not hidden but shared in a way that reveals God at work in someone’s life. Any sign that one is not genuine is reason enough for a Millennial to walk away. Remember, they have a buffet of choices at their fingertips.

²⁴ Paraphrase of Christian Piatt and Amy Piatt, 75.

²⁵ FD, no. 7.

In their search for understanding and community, Millennials seek opportunities to discuss their faith. Therefore, small faith-sharing groups are important. These groups help young adults learn how to apply the gospel message to issues in their lives. In faith-sharing groups they learn to deal with faith crises like going to church when their family or friends do not. "Group experience is a great resource for sharing the faith and for mutual help in witness. The young are able to guide other young people and to exercise a genuine apostolate among their friends."²⁶ As they guide others, Millennials also grow in their own faith.

Catechesis

Millennials want to know their faith. Many of them haven't attended a religious education class in years. Instruction, however, should take into consideration their learning styles by varying the presentations and formats. I have found that location has the greatest impact on catechesis. Since Millennials love cafés, coffee/tea houses, bookstores and restaurants, meet at these places to have class. Reclaiming Christ in Life (ReCiL) is a ministry for young adults which started in the Archdiocese of Chicago in 2004.²⁷ Beginning as a bible study meeting once a month on a Saturday, young adults gathered in a small café to have a meal and "Conversations Over Scripture," where scripture was placed in dialogue with contemporary life. As the founding coordinator of ReCiL, I had tried to have a bible study with young adults at a church but only one person attended. I later discovered that the location and the name were turn-offs. Bible study for these young adults meant that they had to have some previous knowledge, where "Conversations Over Scripture" meant they were free to talk about scripture and that it was okay to not have answers. When we used the café, seldom did anything "come up" that made it impossible for them to attend.

Millennials are visual and love to be mobile, so combining catechesis with field trips and props is a great idea. When teaching on the liturgical year, for example, I brought in several Liturgy Training Publications large liturgical year calendars and put the young adults into groups, each with a calendar. The results were amazing. One of the first things the young adults noticed was the artwork. Others noticed the

²⁶ FD, no. 36.

²⁷ ReCiL is pronounced "reseal."

liturgical colors, vaguely connecting the colors to the priest's vestments. Things that I had forgotten to mention were asked all because the calendars were intriguing. It is noteworthy to mention how they were drawn in by the different artful interpretations for each year, which led to a discussion about the changes we go through as we mature. Not everything has to be a PowerPoint presentation. Sometimes young adults need to hold something in their hands. To help them better connect to the Liturgy, catechesis must help them reclaim their imagination. "Ritual experiences presume a process of imagination. While we may not share the same symbolic meaning for each practice, the act itself is expected to represent some greater concept. This act is how we bring the absent into our presence, but if the ability to imagine the symbolic significance of the ritual is not there, the words and actions are void of any greater meaning other than the literal experience itself."²⁸ Whatever method one uses to teach, opportunities for discussion must be present. If discussion doesn't allow for the lesson to be completed, don't worry, Millennials will come back when they know they can ask questions and not be judged.

What can the Liturgy do?

Millennials want a good homily. They tell me constantly "We want relevant preaching." They want to hear content, enthusiasm, and challenge, and they want to learn something, all in a language they can understand. An important thing to consider is that Millennials expect what they hear preached from the pulpit to be lived out, therefore, they want homilies to have practical applications. They are not interested in pulpit messages that leave one wondering about the meaning. I contend that Millennials don't need video displays of the homiletic theme projected on large screens to pay attention, but they do need the message to apply to them. Everyone does.

Though music helps to make a "good liturgy" it does not deter Millennials from attending the Liturgy. Music, however, is important. "Good" music, as described by some of the young adults with whom I work, should be participatory having a simple refrain that can be easily repeated. Choir or solo performances are fine, but Millennials can plug into their own devices for that. There should be a variety of music ranging from up tempo to contemplative. Music ministers should be enthusiastic about their ministry with the caution that a good choir

²⁸ Christian Piatt and Amy Piatt, 80-81.

doesn't make a good liturgy. Also, of note, a good homily makes bad music bearable.

The Liturgy has to help Millennials picture themselves in the salvation history of the Church, keeping in mind that it cannot and should not do everything. When the Liturgy journeys through scripture, Millennials come to learn more about the saving love of God. When the homily illustrates how the scriptures apply to their lives, Millennials want to be a part of God's saving love. The Liturgy, as the work of the people should reflect the experiences of everyone, not just a select group. All are invited to the table, at once. There is no "children's table" in the Liturgy.

Outside the Liturgy

The virtual world of young adults can be blended into the liturgy through the creation and/or revival of rituals and devotions that occur outside the Liturgy. One devotional practice that has gained popularity is Eucharistic Adoration. When Eucharistic Adoration is presented as time spent in the presence of Jesus, even non-Catholic young adults feel comfortable participating. When I was the active coordinator of ReCiL, I thought the young adults had become bored with Eucharistic Adoration and I was going to cancel it. However, the young adult leader of the Adoration time stated, "I look forward to this half an hour alone with God. When else do I have time to talk with Him? This time is set aside. I don't allow anything to interfere. I find myself looking forward to Wednesdays."²⁹ Many of the young adults started going to Mass or their Mass attendance increased after participating in Eucharistic Adoration. They say that they have a better understanding of why they need to be there.

The Church must also make opportunities for young adults to serve others. Millennials have a propensity to social justice since so many of the injustices they have witnessed have been perpetrated against someone their own age. Retreats, seminars and workshops that are typically no longer than a day will be a big draw. In keeping with technology, the local church/parish and young adult group need to have a website that goes beyond giving information about events, but that actively ministers. For many Millennials, the website is their first stop and if it doesn't grab them, more than likely they won't show up to any

²⁹ Andre Senegal at a ReCiL Young Adult Wednesday Event, March 2008.

events, let alone the Liturgy. Websites that require more than two clicks to find information are too complicated. Postings that are longer than four lines take too long to read.

Conclusion

In looking at young adult liturgical experience I have taken the stance that the US culture has greatly affected how young adults respond to the Liturgy. I've shown how societal changes have affected each generation's view of the Church and the Liturgy. Although answering questions like "What is my purpose in life? What is God's plan for me?" are not new questions for any generation, Millennial Catholics are faced with more interference than any previous generation in attempting to respond. The fact that Millennial Catholics are trying to navigate through the flood of information toward God's clarifying voice is hopeful.

I've tried to convey the importance of catechesis in liturgy with US young adults, remembering that the Liturgy is not for the uninitiated.³⁰ In my own work with Millennials, I've helped them to discover that it takes work to enter into the Liturgy and that this work cannot be done from the outside. As Millennials learn more about their faith, they find their voices, they learn that sometimes they must be silence in order to converse with God, and they become unafraid to speak up in a room full of older Catholics.

With so many things competing for the attention of Millennials, the Church must compete in such a way as to not be filtered out. The Church has to embrace many of the marketing strategies used in the business sector. The marketing strategy I recommend starting with is social media. Many don't like social media for what is there, but I contend that Catholics need to be present on social media to tell the story of God as lived in ordinary people's lives. Pastors and their staffs must listen to the concerns of young adults and respond with respect and appreciation. Key to all the work that must be done in the Church today is accompaniment. Young adults need and want guidance. They want someone to journey with them to help them realize that life doesn't have to be lived without God. Young adults need deliberate faith

³⁰ I am using uninitiated in the sense that inadequate catechesis leaves one without an understanding of the role Liturgy plays in faith formation.

formation fueled by prayer and service to others. And, the Church can do just that.

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